

Amstel House  
New Castle, Delaware  
Newcastle County

HABS No. 9-3  
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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District No. 9

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Albert Kruse, District Officer  
Old Town Hall, Wilmington, Del.

AMSTEL HOUSE  
Newcastle, Newcastle County  
Delaware

Owner: The Amstel House Committee.

Date of Erection: About 1728 ? (see following page); 1728 (index card).

Architect: No record.

Builder: No record.

Present Condition: Good.

Number of Stories: Two, and basement.

Materials of Construction: Brick.

Other Existing Records: See text.<sup>1</sup>

Additional Data: See following pages.

<sup>1</sup> See also Hammond, J.M., Colonial Mansions of Maryland and Delaware, pp. 247-248; White Pine Series of Architectural Monographs, 1926, vol.xii; Faris, J.T., Historic Shrines of America, p. 205; Bennett, G.F., Early Architecture of Delaware, pp. 60-64, 176.

AMSTEL HOUSE  
New Castle, Delaware

This building was thought to <sup>have</sup> been built about 1728, the date being agreed upon by study of architectural detail such as, the sash of the windows, the angle of the watershed and the character of the panelling. The transfer of the property traces its existence to 1734, when it was the property of William Goddard. From the list of owners which is at present in the Amstel House we find after William Goddard; James Mackey, October 25, 1738; Dr. John Finney, October 31, 1738; his two daughters, Elizabeth and Anne Dorothea; Joseph Tatlow, April, 1795; his son, Thomas H. Tatlow, April 6, 1827; John Moody, April 13, 1832; his daughter, Sophia Hanson Moody; her niece, Elizabeth V. L. Burnham, July 20, 1869; her son, John Burnham; Sophia B. Hay, July 27, 1904; her sister, Mrs. Louise R. Holcomb, November 10, 1925; and the present group known as "The Amstel House Committee".

Although its plan was English, the oak was Delawarean and the bricks <sup>were</sup> made in the southern part of New Castle. The builder's name is unknown, but he was a master-craftsman even though no two windows are alike and one bay is an inch wider than its fellow. The rear wing of the house is said to be older than the present front part. The story heights are lower and it is unexcavated, only the front part having a cellar. The cornice is slightly different in detail. There is no record of the difference in dates and the character of the work indicates very little time elapsed before the larger house was built. The brick work on

both wings is identical and only on closest examination is it evident that the two walls, of different dates, have been bonded to-gether.

The most famous historic event seems to be the visit of George Washington to attend the wedding of Anne Van Dyke to Kensey Johns. This is recorded by means of an inscription cut on the hearthstone: "George Washington April 30 1784". Lafayette also was among the distinguished visitors while Nicholas Van Dyke was a tenant. In 1785 Van Dyke vacated and his daughter Anne and her husband took up their residence in the house which they called "The Corner". It was during this time that the following couplet, still in existence, was scratched with a diamond on a pane of glass in the north bedroom;

"Around her head ye angels constant vigil keep  
And guard fair innocence her balmy sleep  
This be our parting gift to you, sweet friends"

There is also some writing on a pane of glass in the small room at the head of the stairs.

During the ownership of John Burnham the house was tenanted by various individuals among them a tailor, a grocer and a lodger. Professor Henry Hanby Hay, whose wife was Sophia Rodney, a great-grand niece of Caesar Rodney, then purchased the house and it was due to Mr. Hay's interest that the old house was again renovated in March 1905 and the work later carried on by a group of New Castle people. Mr. Laussat R. Rogers of Totten and Rogers, 1120 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was the architect consulted. He found the first opening on the south side had been made into a door. This with the third opening which had always

been a door ~~was~~ bricked up to form windows; various partitions which had been put up inside were taken down and the woodwork renovated. A shed in the rear on the north west side was removed and the present room, 3ft. 6in. x 13ft., added as a servant's room, with bath and hall above. This necessitated putting a doorway and steps in place of the window on the rear wall of the staircase hall and also cutting a doorway from the hall adjoining the bath to the south west bedroom. (Previously entrance to this room had been through the south east chamber.) A modern heating system was installed, the flues being placed as inconspicuously as possible and the house, now called "Amstel House", used as a residence by Professor Hay until 1925. In 1910 a porch was added on the north end facing the garden, but was removed in 1931. The addition with bay window on the west side was also added at this time and is still standing.

In June 1929 Amstel House became an Historical Museum. In January 1933, Norman Banks, a local craftsman, removed the modern fireplace concealing the original beautiful colonial fireplace in the music room and restored it to its original condition. At the same time the woodwork was renovated; one room in the attic turned into an arts and crafts room; and, in another, glass cases were installed to hold costumes. The modern kitchen equipment was removed and the original fireplace which had been bricked up was opened and place for a baker's oven was disclosed. Since 1929 the house has been refurnished with antiques both donated and loaned.

When the Burnhams left New Castle a portion of the garden

was sold for building lots, but in 1931 the Brandywine Garden Club consulted Charles F. Gillette, a landscape architect from Richmond, Virginia, who laid out an old-fashioned garden such as might have surrounded the house (but this is not a restoration). In 1932 the garden was enclosed by a brick wall erected by the Colonial Dames of America (Delaware Chapter) and the Delaware Sons of Colonial Wars.

This house has been widely used as an example of the finest colonial architecture. Most of the information contained in this article is from the "White Pine Series"; "Colonial Architecture for those about to build", by Herbert C. Wise; "Stories of Old New Castle" by Anne R. Janvier; the records of Mr. L. R. Rogers, Boothurst, New Castle; various newspaper clippings on file in the Wilmington Institute Free Library; "Annals of Amstel House" by H. H. Hay and the records at Amstel House Historical Museum. Mrs. Douglas Dundas acts as hostess, and is the present occupant.

*Dorothy A. Mendenhall*  
Approved

*Arthur H. Kruse*

*Reviewed 1936, H.C.F.*